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PART FOUR

Studying the Folktale

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CLASSIFYING FOLK NARRATIVE

IV

BEFORE it can become an object of serious and well-considered study, every branch of knowledge needs to be classified. There was a time when geology and botany consisted of random collections of facts and hastily constructed theories. It was only when this anecdotal stage gave way to systematic classification that real progress was made toward a thorough method of study.

With the folktale the long lack of analysis and orderly arrangement led to much confused discussion and was at least partly responsible for a good deal of the premature and ill considered theorizing characteristic of many nineteenth century folklorists. The materials with which the student of traditional narrative deals is so enormous in its bulk, so varied in its form, so widely distributed geographically and historically that an actual firsthand acquaintance with it all is beyond one man's powers. Yet though his personal journey of inspection through this vast domain can cover but a small district, he needs an adequate map to give him proper orientation in respect to the whole. It is only when he is thoroughly aware that the subject of his research is essentially world-wide that the man who deals with the folktale can avoid a narrow parochialism that exaggerates the importance of the folklore of his particular land or that founds all-embracing theories on the special habits of expression of a small portion of mankind.

The student of local or national tradition needs comprehensive classifications as a stimulus toward widening horizons, but the scholar of the opposite type needs it even more to keep him from aimless wandering. He cannot go far without the help of the classifier and the cataloguer.

The chief practical use that is always made of scientific classifications is for listing and cataloguing. Biologists have long since labeled their flora and fauna by a universal system and by using this method have published

¹ Some parts of this chapter are taken with little change from my article, "Purpose and Importance of an Index of Types and Motifs," *Folk-Liv*, 1938, pp. 103-108.

thousands of inventories of the animal and plant life of all parts of the world. In like manner it should be possible to make available for study the entire body of collected folk-narrative in the world. This is best done by exhaustive catalogues covering particular countries or areas. For such catalogues there must be classifications that are reasonably logical and reasonably complete, that are applicable to the material everywhere, and that are not too cumbersome to be easily learned and used.

The need for such an arrangement of narrative has been realized for a long time, and several endeavors have been made to devise systems. The first attempt at a logical ordering of folktales was made in 1864 by J. G. von Hahn in the notes to his *Griechische und albanesische Märchen*.² His system has for us now only a historical interest, for it was grounded on a relatively small number of tales and it was too much concerned with correlating modern folktales with Greek myths. From a practical point of view his greatest weakness was his complete disregard of the fundamental difference between the tale type and the separate motifs of which it is composed.

As a result of these difficulties Hahn's system was never used and most folklorists continued to refer to tales by well-known names, such as Cinderella, Cupid and Psyche, Snow White, or Jack and the Beanstalk or else by the purely accidental numbers they bore in great collections, such as the Grimms' *Household Tales*. In the course of time such annotators as Köhler gave currency to a large number of apt phrases descriptive of incidents in tales and of other motifs. Though books using such lists usually have an alphabetical index, it is helpful only to the person who happens to know the style of catchword or title employed and is thoroughly familiar with the language used. Nevertheless these three forms of reference, the well-known title, the Grimm number, and the motif catchword, have continued in use down to the present time and for casual reference have done good service. Köhler's and Cosquin's works, all of Bolte's, including the *Anmerkungen* to Grimm, and the *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Märchens* depend for their usefulness upon such alphabetical lists. The invaluable motif-references collected over a long lifetime by the Danish scholar H. F. Feilberg are similarly arranged, both in his dictionary of the Jutish dialect,³ and his manuscript card catalogue in Copenhagen.⁴

A serious attempt to construct a comprehensive list of catchwords—naturally from the point of view of the English language—was made by Joseph Jacobs, and presented at the International Folklore Congress in London in 1891. It marked no real progress toward a classification, for it was merely an alphabetical list of motifs and types indiscriminately mixed.

² Two vols., Leipzig, 1864; new edition, München, 1918.

³ *Bidrag til en Ordbog over Jyske Almuesmål* (4 vols., København, 1886-1914).

⁴ See H. Ellekilde, *Nachschlageregister zu Feilberg* (FF Communications, No. 85, Helsinki, 1929).

The terms, many of them already in general use, were perhaps given a wider currency by Jacobs' work, but that is all.

These alphabetical lists which we have mentioned were confined almost exclusively to Europe and the Near East, and no convenient means of reference existed for primitive peoples. It is natural that the energetic collectors of American Indian tales should have found need for something of the kind. The beginning was made by Robert H. Lowie and Alfred L. Kroeber, who issued lists in 1908.⁵ These were later (1916) used and expanded in the masterly study of *Tsimshian Mythology* by Franz Boas, and have been added to continually by such collectors as Elsie Clews Parsons. For the American Indian field such catchwords have proved convenient; but their use is strictly limited geographically, and like all of the other alphabetical lists, they confuse tale types and the smaller motifs.

For a systematic classification of folk narrative a clear differentiation between type and motif is necessary, for the problems of arrangement are essentially different in the two fields. Such a study as Miss Cox's *Cinderella* shows clearly how a complete tale (the type) is made up of a number of motifs in a relatively fixed order and combination. An example will be her analysis of Grimm's version of *Cinderella*:

Ill-treated heroine (by step-mother and step-sisters)—Hearth-abode—Gifts chosen by three daughters from father. Heroine chooses hazel-branch, and plants it on mother's grave.—Help at grave—Task (grain sorting)—Task-performing animals (birds)—Transformed mother help (bird on tree)—Magic dresses—Meeting-place (ball)—Three-fold flight—Heroine hides (1) in pear-tree, (2) in pigeon-house, which are cut down by father—Pitch-trap—Lost shoe—Shoe marriage test—Mutilated feet—False brides—Animal witness (birds)—Happy marriage—Villain Nemesis.⁶

A type is a traditional tale that has an independent existence. It may be told as a complete narrative and does not depend for its meaning on any other tale. It may indeed happen to be told with another tale, but the fact that it may appear alone attests its independence. It may consist of only one motif or of many. Most animal tales and jokes and anecdotes are types of one motif. The ordinary *Märchen* (tales like *Cinderella* or *Snow White*) are types consisting of many of them.

A *motif* is the smallest element in a tale having a power to persist in tradition. In order to have this power it must have something unusual and striking about it. Most motifs fall into three classes. First are the actors in a tale—gods, or unusual animals, or marvelous creatures like witches, ogres, or fairies, or even conventionalized human characters like the favorite youngest child or the cruel stepmother. Second come certain items in the background of the action—magic objects, unusual customs, strange beliefs,

⁵ *Journal of American Folklore*, XXI (1908), 24-27, 222.

⁶ Cox, *Cinderella*, p. 17, No. 37.

and the like. In the third place there are single incidents—and these comprise the great majority of motifs. It is this last class that can have an independent existence and that may therefore serve as true tale-types. By far the largest number of traditional types consist of these single motifs.

For the purpose of furnishing a basis for the survey of traditional narrative in an area having a large common store of tales a type-index is necessary; the principal use of a motif-index is to display identity or similarity in the tale elements in all parts of the world so that they can be conveniently studied. A type-index implies that all versions of a type have a genetic relationship; a motif-index makes no such assumption.

It has been pointed out in the discussion of his plan for regional folktale surveys⁷ that Kaarle Krohn recognized the prior necessity of a comprehensive folktale classification. The preparation of this work was entrusted to Antti Aarne, who had the constant advice of Krohn and the help of Oskar Hackman of Helsinki, Axel Olrik of Copenhagen, Johannes Bolte of Berlin, and C. W. von Sydow of Lund. The general purpose and plan may be described in Aarne's own words:

The difficulties with which the student of comparative folk literature must contend in the collecting of material are undoubtedly greatest in the special field of the folk-tale. This circumstance has induced the Folk-Lore Fellows to set as their first goal the preparation of catalogues of tales. A list of Finnish folk-tales, the preparation of which has been entrusted to the undersigned, is to open the series of these catalogues. The rich treasure of tales which is found in possession of the Finnish Literary Society, and the contents of which for linguistic reasons have up to the present remained for the greater part unknown to foreign scholars, will no longer be shut up in this way and will be made available for use.

Yet this first catalogue has necessitated certain preliminary work. There has existed no system that arranged the various types to be found in the variegated multitude of folk-tales and united them into a well-ordered whole. Hence it was desirable to work out such a systematic catalogue of types as would serve the purpose. The need of a common system of classification which should meet so far as possible the demands of the various countries has been felt for a long time. Such a system, to be sure, has its significance in so far as it arranges and classifies folk-tales, but its importance is primarily practical. How much would it facilitate the work of the collector of tales if all the collections of folk-tales thus far printed should be arranged according to the same system. The scholar would be in a position to discover in a moment the material for which he has need in any collection, whereas at present he is compelled to look through the entire work if he wishes to acquaint himself with the contents. For each editor has arranged his collection according to his own judgment, which in only a few instances has been guided by a deeper knowledge of the subject. Material that belongs together or is closely

⁷ See pp. 396 ff., above

related is often found scattered here and there. If now the classification of types issued by the Folk-Lore Fellows, in their collections and catalogues to appear in the future, should come into general use, the collecting of material would thereby be made very much easier.⁸

Aarne was careful to disclaim any pretension to completeness. He used as a foundation the huge manuscript collection of tales at Helsinki, the Grundtvig material at Copenhagen and the Grimms' *Household Tales*. Even from these he made a few omissions when he felt that he was not dealing with a real folktale, and he added a few numbers from other sources. He realized that his classification was tentative and that it was reasonably complete only for northern Europe. He felt certain that it would be expanded in the future and with that in mind left many numbers open for new types. Though the index consisted of but 540 items, the system of numbers extends to 1940.

A clear-cut difference between type and motif distinguishes the *Verzeichnis der Märchentypen* from all previous lists. As Aarne says,

So far as possible a complete narrative has served as a basis for each type. It might also naturally be conceivable to work out a classification of separate episodes and motifs, yet this would have necessitated such a cutting into pieces of all complete folk-tales that the scholar would be able to make a much more limited use of the classification. Nevertheless in some instances one is compelled to depart from the method decided upon. The separate tales belonging to the cycle of the stupid ogre are told by the people in such varied combinations that the necessity presented itself of handling each episode under its own number. In part, the same method had to be followed in connection with the animal tales and the humorous anecdotes. All of this has given rise to a certain inconsistency, but looked at from the standpoint of practical usefulness, which is the chief goal set up in the construction of the system of classification, this procedure has seemed most advisable. Otherwise, the information given to the scholar by a catalogue of tales based upon a system of types would in certain places seem entirely too general. Moreover, it is to be noted that the separate stories which generally appear as parts of a longer narrative are occasionally found by themselves, and then in any case merit an independent place.⁹

An examination of the index reveals the fact that somewhat more than half of the types included consist of a single narrative motif. For such tales the problem of classification is relatively simple, since only one item needs to be considered. The really difficult problem is a logical arrangement of the more than two hundred fifty complex types. Each of these is made up of a whole group of motifs and the question is continually presenting itself as to which of these motifs shall be used as the basis of classification. For example, is it the nature of the principal actor, or some striking external

⁸ *Types*, pp. 8f.

⁹ *Types*, pp. 10f.

accessory of the tale (such as a magic object), or the central event of the action itself which seems most important? It will be seen that in various parts of the type-index Aarne has used each of these methods, according to which seemed most applicable to the group of tales in question. Theoretical consistency has made way for practical convenience.

Aarne's general system is clearly stated in the Introduction to his Index:

Taken as a whole, the tales are divided for the purpose of classification into three principal groups: animal tales, regular folk-tales, and humorous tales. For the animal tales, the smaller groups are differentiated according to the kind of animals playing a part in the story; and in each of these groups again the tales dealing with the same animal are placed together. Thus, for example, the group of wild animals begins with the favorite of folk-tales, the sly fox. Wherever animals belonging to different groups appear in a tale, the decision as to the place to be assigned the tale has been determined by the question as to which animal plays the leading role in the action. Thus, to cite an example, the tale "More Timid than the Hare" is not ranged with the stories of the fox but with the group, "Other Wild Animals," since the hare is here the principal character; likewise "The Dog and the Sparrow" (Type 248) is among the tales of birds and not in the group, "Domestic Animals."

The largest group of tales, ordinary folk-tales, is divided into magic or wonder tales, religious stories, romantic stories, and those dealing with the stupid ogre. In the tales of magic is always found some supernatural factor, and generally likewise in the religious; whereas the romantic stories move entirely within the bounds of possibility. For the tales of the stupid ogre it has been difficult to find a satisfactory place in the classification. They are really wonder-tales and as such should be placed along with other wonder-tales, but since, on the other hand, in their character and nature they resemble the humorous tales, they have been placed as the last group of the regular folk-tales, next to the humorous anecdotes. In the arranging of the tales of magic into subdivisions, the persistence of the element of wonder, of the supernatural becomes clear. Thus these groups stand out: the supernatural adversary, in which group cross-reference is made to the closely-related ogre tales; the supernatural husband or wife; the supernatural task; the supernatural helper; the supernatural object; supernatural knowledge or power; and, lastly, a group in which some other supernatural element enters. These groups are again, in so far as possible, separated in accordance with their contents into new subdivisions; just as has also been done with the religious and romantic tales.

Sometimes it happens that the same tale can be assigned to two different groups. In company with a supernatural adversary or helper, for example, a magic object may appear. The issue as to position is decided in accordance with which factor is most important for the action of the tale; but in addition the tale in question is also recorded in parentheses in the second position, with a note as to the place assigned it in the classification. . . .

The third group of tales, jokes and anecdotes (*Schwänke*), will doubtless receive with the passage of time more additional numbers than the animal

tales or the ordinary folk-tales; for these humorous tales originate more easily among the people than other kinds. As the first subdivision of the jokes and anecdotes, the classification shows the numskull stories, which are arranged in accordance with whether they deal with farming, herding, fishing, hunting, building, preparing food, or other similar processes. The next part deals with "married couples," with a "woman" or with a "man." In the last-named, most numerous group, are further divisions into tales of the clever man, of lucky accidents, of the stupid man, and of the parson. In stories of the parson, he is usually treated as a fool, and especially often by the sexton, a fact which has been considered in arranging the tales of parsons. The last group of jokes and anecdotes forms the "Tales of Lying," which differentiate themselves into hunting tales, accounts of enormous animals, objects, etc.¹⁰

At the time of its appearance the *Verzeichnis der Märchentypen* received practically no notice, and it was only after Aarne had given an object lesson of its use in his catalogue of Finnish tales and Oskar Hackman in his index of the Finnish-Swedish types that students of the folktale realized its value.¹¹ These surveys were the beginning of a series that has continued ever since. In spite of the World War, eight of them appeared before Aarne's death in 1923, covering, in addition to the two areas just mentioned, Estonia, Norway, Lapland, Flanders, Bohemia, and Livonia. Though each of the scholars who have prepared surveys proposed numerous additions, they found the general plan of the classification entirely satisfactory as a basis for their work.¹²

By 1924 the many additional types which had been suggested made the time seem ripe for the revision of the *Verzeichnis*, to which Aarne had looked forward. But this great Finnish scholar died too soon to carry out the plan, and Professor Krohn invited the present writer to undertake it. During the academic year 1926-27 the revision and expansion of the Index was finished¹³ and was published in 1928 under the title *The Types of the Folk-Tale*.

¹⁰ *Types*, pp. 12-14.

¹¹ The slowness with which the Aarne index came into use is illustrated by the fact that although it was issued in 1910 and although I was in great need of just such an index for work on my dissertation at Harvard University from 1912 to 1914, it entirely escaped my attention and no one there seems to have heard of it for several years thereafter.

¹² These surveys were: A. Aarne, *Finnische Märchenvarianten* (FF Communications, Nos. 5 and 33) and *Estnische Märchen- und Sagenvarianten* (FF Communications, No. 25); O. Hackman, *Katalog der Märchen der finländischen Schweden* (FF Communications, No. 6); J. Qvigstad, *Lappische Märchen- und Sagenvarianten* (FF Communications, No. 60); R. Th. Christensen, *The Norwegian Fairytale, a Short Summary* (FF Communications, No. 46 [an abstract of *Norske Eventyr*, Kristiania, 1921]); M. de Meyer, *Les Contes Populaires de la Flandre* (FF Communications, No. 37); O. Looorits, *Livische Märchen- und Sagenvarianten* (FF Communications, No. 66); V. Tille, *Verzeichnis der Böhmisches Märchen* (FF Communications, No. 34), having its own peculiar arrangement, but with cross-references to Aarne's list.

¹³ My work on the index during this year's sojourn in Europe was greatly encouraged and aided by a number of able folklorists whom I then met for the first time. I had the good fortune at the very beginning of my stay to meet Krohn and Bolte together in Copenhagen

The revision was much more than a translation of Aarne into English with certain additional items. Although none of the new types which had appeared in the various surveys were omitted, a number of them were rejected from the main index, as having only local interest and were relegated to a supplementary list. Aarne's general scheme was not disturbed, and all of his type-numbers were retained. Additions were made from French folktales and from well-known literary stories which have become a part of popular tradition. The original index was baffling to all but very expert students of the tale because of the brevity of the description given each type and because of the lack of guidance as to where the tale could be found.¹⁴

Usually the exact original text of Aarne's statement was retained but was followed by such elaboration as seemed desirable. In complex tales this addition consisted in a detailed generalized statement of the type, and an analysis into constituent motifs.¹⁵ For such statements great help was found in the Bolte-Polívka *Anmerkungen* and in Christiansen's *Norske Eventyr*, both of which had appeared subsequent to Aarne's list. Various monographs on tales also helped formulate these statements.

Instead of the occasional bibliographical references in the *Verzeichnis*, the revision attempted to list not only the Grimm and Grundtvig numbers but also all studies of the tale, great and small, especially those in Bolte-Polívka or in FF Communications. Indications were given as to which of the regional surveys contain the type and frequent references to American Indian or African versions were added.

Since the appearance of this revision the preparation of tale surveys has continued. The Russian index¹⁶ which came out almost immediately afterwards made some last-minute changes in accordance with the new edition. In FF Communications have appeared surveys of Roumanian, Hungarian, Icelandic, Spanish, and Walloon folktales.¹⁷ Published elsewhere have been

and to talk over plans. Arnold van Gennep in Paris, Edouard Hoffmann-Krayer and Hanns Bächtold-Stäubli in Basel, John Meier in Freiburg-im-Breisgau, Eugen Fehrle in Heidelberg, Hans Naumann in Frankfurt, Hugo Hepding in Giessen, and Jan de Vries in Leiden were all cordial and helpful. Most of the work was done in Paris, but it was completed during a two months' stay in Copenhagen, where the invaluable collections of the Dansk Folkminde-samling were available. Hans Ellekilde, the *arkivar*, gave me constant aid, and Ferdinand Ohrt and Arthur Christensen of Copenhagen, C. W. von Sydow of Lund, and R. Th. Christiansen of Oslo all helped make the stay in Scandinavia invaluable. Finally a week in Helsinki with Professor Krohn not only brought a pleasant climax to the year but cleared up many difficulties which could be solved in no other way.

¹⁴ A few of the types could be found and explained only after a search of the Danish MSS in Copenhagen and the Finnish in Helsinki.

¹⁵ Numbers were inserted throughout, referring to the *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, then in preparation.

¹⁶ A. N. Andrejev, *Ukazatel' Skazočnych Sjužetov po Sisteme Aarne* (Gosud. russ. geogr. obščestvo, otd. etnogr. skazočnaya komissiya, Leningrad, 1929).

¹⁷ A. Schullerus, *Verzeichnis der rumänischen Märchen* (FF Communications, No. 78); H. Honti, *Verzeichnis der publizierten ungarischen Märchen* (FF Communications, No. 81); E.

lists from Prussia and Lithuania.¹⁸ Besides this a number of tale collections have appeared with an index after the Aarne classification.¹⁹ Several surveys are finished but unpublished.²⁰

One of the changes made in the revision was the addition of formulistic tales—particularly cumulative stories. A notable improvement in that part of the index has been made by Archer Taylor who revised that section in 1933.²¹

A problem discussed at the Congress for the Study of the Folktale at Lund in 1935 was the further revision of the Type-Index. It was agreed that such a revision must be made and that it must be greatly strengthened by an adequate consideration of material from southern and eastern Europe from the Moslem countries, and from India. A series of special studies of the tales of this part of the world is necessary before a revision can be adequately carried out.²²

Though the Aarne index has been generally accepted, it is natural that there should have been criticisms of detail. Some of these are theoretical and are not directed toward an actual change in the classification,²³ though they do bring to light useful relationships between types widely separated in the Index. Others suggest more accurate subdivision at various points.²⁴

Ol. Sveinsson, *Verzeichnis isländischer Märchenvarianten* (FF Communications, No. 83); R. S. Boggs, *Index of Spanish Folktales* (FF Communications, No. 90); G. Laport, *Les contes populaires Wallons* (FF Communications, No. 101).

¹⁸ Karl Plenzat, *Die ost- und westpreussischen Märchen und Schwänke nach Typen geordnet* (Königsberg, 1927); J. Balys, *Motif-Index of Lithuanian Folktales* (Kaunas, 1936).

¹⁹ In FF Communications No. 10, Aarne published a concordance between his index and several important collections, viz. Grundtvig's classification of Danish tales in the Dansk Folkemindesamling; Grimm's *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*; Gonzenbach's *Sicilianische Märchen*; Afanasief's *Narodnie Russkie Skazki*; and Hahn's *Griechische und albanesische Märchen*. Among other works which have appeared with an index according to the Aarne classification are: N. M. Penzer, *The Pentamerone of Basile*; J. G. McKay, *More West Highland Tales*; Jan de Vries, *Volksverhalen uit Oost Indië*; and M. Azadovsky, *Russkaya Skazka* (Moskva, 1930).

²⁰ Three manuscripts in the Indiana University Library contain such surveys: Latin American tales by Cecelia Dean, African tales by May A. Klipple, and European tales among the North American Indians by Llorca B. Lydy. In the University of Chicago Library is a type-index of the collection of exempla, *Scala Celi*, by Luella Carter. In addition there are, of course, card indexes of the various folktale archives which use the Aarne classification; see pp. 398f.

²¹ A. Taylor, "A Classification of Formula Tales," *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, XLVI, 77ff.

²² Since my acceptance at Lund of the responsibility for this revision I have undertaken an analysis of the oral tales of India and, with the cooperation of a group of American Orientalists, also of the great written collections of Indic fiction. In view of the undoubted importance of India in the history of the tale, such a preliminary study seems essential.

²³ For example, the rearrangement suggested in M. Ziegler, *Die Frau im Märchen*. Some pertinent suggestions from the point of view of the Spanish folktale is in A. M. Espinosa's article, "La Clasificación de los Cuentos Populares," *Boletín de la Academia Española*, XXI (Madrid, 1934), 175-208.

²⁴ Especially R. S. Boggs, in his *Index of Spanish Folktales* (FF Communications, No. 90), introduced additional subdivisions and has also provided a valuable alphabetical index which is much fuller than that in the Aarne-Thompson.

A question sometimes broached concerns the desirability and possibility of extending the index of types to embrace the whole world. Of course in so far as the European and West Asiatic tales are found among distant peoples, the present index is usable and has been successfully employed, for example, for African, Indonesian, and North American Indian tales.²⁵ But the native cycles of tales, such as we have examined in Part III of this volume, would probably not easily fit into the Aarne classification. Shall separate type lists be undertaken for each of these great areas or should a serious attempt be made at a radical expansion of the present classification?²⁶ Though some students of primitive tales feel that no such type-lists are necessary, there would seem little doubt that sooner or later they will be attempted.²⁷

In his introduction to the *Verzeichnis* Aarne had mentioned the possibility that one might also make an index of particular motifs. But except in so far as many of the types in his index and all the *Sagen* in the special catalogue he made of these²⁸ consist of but a single incident, he did not himself undertake this task. Up to the time he made this suggestion there existed only alphabetical lists in which motifs and types were indiscriminately mixed, and these inventories were usually very limited in their geographical scope. Nothing on a world-wide scale had been undertaken, and no attempt had been made to arrange motifs in any logical order.

Even the classification proposed by Arthur Christensen in 1925²⁹ was based upon a very restricted group of literary tale and fable collections and its arrangement, though interesting, depended upon considerations entirely too theoretical to permit of its successful use by others. His divisions into "éléments de relation," "motifs," "accessoires épiques," "thème," "motifs sans thème," "motifs a thèmes faibles," etc. left a large number of miscellaneous items that could be handled only by an alphabetical index. Christensen's classification was really only a sketch and made no effort to list more than a relatively small number of motifs to illustrate the different categories proposed.

Nor was the broad division of motifs suggested by Albert Wesselski³⁰ of real help for a comprehensive arrangement. He divided the motifs of folktales, novelle, and myths into "Mythenmotive," "Gemeinschaftsmotive,"

²⁵ For the African and North American Indian tales, see note 20 above. For Indonesian, see DeVries, *Volkssverhalen*. See also pp. 283f., above.

²⁶ In DeVries's notes to his Indonesian tales (*Volkssverhalen*) he has successfully employed a greatly expanded form of the Aarne index.

²⁷ Something of a beginning of a list for American aborigines can be seen in the notes to my *Tales of the North American Indians*.

²⁸ *Verzeichnis der finnischen Ursprungssagen und ihrer Varianten* (FF Communications, No. 8, Hamina, 1912).

²⁹ *Motif et Thème* (FF Communications, No. 59, Helsinki, 1925).

³⁰ *Märchen des Mittelalters*, p. 17.

and "Kulturmotive," and on a basis of this distinction discussed the difference between the narrative forms. But he gave only samples of each class and was not concerned with the question of a general index.

The present writer became interested in the problem of classifying the elements of tales many years before he actually undertook it. As a necessary part of several of his early studies, particularly his doctoral dissertation on *European Tales among the North American Indians*, he began the accumulation of references to incidents and other traits in tales both European and American Indian. All the lists then in existence were copied, each item on a separate card, and additions grew at such a rate that a tentative arrangement of the material became imperative. With the new notes made available by the publication of the Bolte-Polívka *Anmerkungen* and with those resulting from further reading in the American Indian field, the tentative arrangement had to be modified again and again. When in 1922 the author decided to undertake a study of the incidents in American Indian tales which were not obvious borrowings from Europe, he became convinced that all such studies must await an adequate classification of motifs.

A tentative draft was first worked out, based upon the notes which had already been taken. This first form, extending only to some four hundred pages, revealed a number of weaknesses of detail in the classification and demonstrated that in order to be of real value the Index must be based on as extensive a foundation as possible. It was this conviction that delayed the work so much, for the program of reading and note-taking determined on in 1923 was so extensive that actual writing did not begin until five years later.⁸¹ Publication began in 1932 and was completed in 1936.

This is not a proper place to discuss in detail the works covered as a basis for the *Motif-Index*. The ideal was to bring together narrative elements from as many different fields of traditional fiction as possible. Tales and myths from primitive peoples everywhere, European and Oriental stories and ballads, local and explanatory legends, the well-known mythological cycles, literary collections like the *Panchatantra* and the *Thousand and One Nights*, fabliaux, exempla, jestbooks—all such works were explored and analyzed. Folklore journals of all kinds, and all books with comparative studies of tales or incidents—Bolte-Polívka, the files of FF Communications, Cosquin's works, and the like—these all swelled the accumulations with the fruit of other men's labors.

The *Motif-Index* thus attempts to bring together material from everywhere and arrange it by a logical system. It makes no assumption that items listed next to each other have any genetic relationship, but only that they belong in neighboring logical categories. The classification is for the

⁸¹ Work was interrupted for the preparation of *Tales of the North American Indians*, in which were published all my notes in that field. In this way it was possible to avoid overloading the *Motif-Index* with these references. The revision of *The Types of the Folk-Tale* was also made during these years.

practical purpose of arranging and assorting narrative material so that it can be easily found. In that respect it most resembles a library classification, where books good and bad, old and new, large and small appear together on the shelves: all that matters is that the items belong to the same division and subdivision of human knowledge. The general scheme finally adopted is thus described in the Introduction of the *Motif-Index*:

In a very general fashion the groups may be said to progress from the mythological and the supernatural toward the realistic and even the humorous. But no such progress is to be observed in all parts of the index: the last half is nearly all realistic.

In Chapter A are handled motifs having to do with creation and with the nature of the world: creators, gods, and demigods; the creation and nature of the universe, and especially of the earth; the beginnings of life; the creation and establishment of the animal and vegetable world.

Chapter B is concerned with animals. Not all tales in which animals figure are placed here, for most frequently it is the action and not the particular actor that is significant in such stories. In Chapter B, on the contrary, appear animals that are in some way remarkable as such: mythical animals like the dragon, magic animals like the truth-telling bird, animals with human traits, animal kingdoms, weddings, and the like. Then there are the many helpful or grateful beasts, marriages of animals to human beings, and other fanciful ideas about animals.

Just as the motifs in Chapter B suggest some possible relation to the savage institution of totemism, those in Chapter C are based upon the primitive idea of tabu. Forbidden things of all kinds are here listed, as well as the opposite of that concept, the unique compulsion.

The most extensive group is that devoted to magic (Chapter D). The divisions are quite simple: transformation and disenchantment, magic objects and their employment, magic powers and other manifestations.

The motifs listed in Chapter E concern ideas about the dead—resuscitation, ghosts, and reincarnation—as well as ideas concerning the nature of the soul.

Aside from magic and the return of the dead, traditional literature records many marvels: journeys to other worlds; extraordinary creatures such as fairies, spirits, and demons; wondrous places, such as castles in the sea; and marvelous persons and events. These form Chapter F.

Because of the prominence of dreadful beings, such as ogres, witches, and the like, these have been given a special division, G. It will be seen that there is naturally much relation between Chapter E, F, and G; for example, between ogres and evil spirits, or between fairies and witches or ghosts. These relationships are noted by means of cross references.

Beginning with Chapter H, the purely supernatural assumes a minor importance, though it is still present. Chapter H has been formed gradually from three separate divisions in the original plan. These, however, are all comprehended under the term "Tests." Tales of recognition are really tests of identity; riddles and the like, tests of cleverness; and tasks and quests, tests of prowess. In addition are to be found sundry tests of character and other qualities.

Chapter J was likewise originally three chapters—Wisdom, Cleverness, Foolishness. Their fundamental unity is apparent: the motivation is always mental. The first part (Wisdom) consists in large part of fable material. The tales of cleverness and of stupidity come in large measure from jestbooks.

In the motifs in Chapter J the attention is directed primarily to the mental quality of the character. In K, on the contrary, primary importance is given to action. A very large part of narrative literature deals with deceptions. The work of thieves and rascals, deceptive captures and escapes, seductions, adultery, disguises, and illusions constitute one of the most extensive chapters in the classification.

The rest of the work is made up of smaller chapters. In "L" appear such reversals of fortune as the success of the unpromising child or the downfall of the proud. "M" deals with such definite ordaining of the future as irrevocable judgments, bargains, promises, and oaths. In "N" the large part that luck plays in narrative is shown. Tales of gambling, and of the favors and evil gifts of the Goddess Fortuna appear here.

Chapter P concerns the social system. Not all tales about kings and princes belong here, but only such motifs as rest upon some feature of the social order: customs concerning kings, or the relation of the social ranks and the professions, or anything noteworthy in the administration of such activities as law or army. A very great number of cross-references appear in this chapter.

In "Q" are recorded rewards and punishments, in "R" motifs concerning captives and fugitives, and in "S" instances of great cruelty. In "T" are treated together the motifs dealing with sex, though there are, of course, many other parts of the index where such motifs are also of interest. Here particularly come wooing, marriage, married life, and the birth of children, as well as sundry types of sexual relations.

In Chapter U are gathered a small number of motifs, mostly from fable literature, that are of a homiletic tendency. A tale is told with the sole purpose of showing the nature of life. "Thus goes the world" is the text of such tales.

Many incidents depend upon religious differences or upon certain objects of religious worship. These motifs make up Chapter V. In "W" stories designed to illustrate traits of character are classified. The last of the systematic divisions, "X", contains incidents whose purpose is entirely humorous. Many cross-references to merry tales listed elsewhere are, of course, given.

At the end, in Chapter Z, appear several small classifications which hardly deserve a chapter each. In the future should other small classifications seem desirable, they can easily be added as new parts of Chapter Z.

A numbering system was devised, remotely similar to that used by the Library of Congress, so that the Index can be indefinitely expanded at any point. Every motif has a number indicating its place in the classification. The details of the system are not difficult. Chapters (indicated by capital letters) are divided into large groups, usually of 100 numbers, and these in turn into tens, etc.

An attempt was made to furnish some bibliographical help with each motif, so that the work would have value as a general reference book on

folk narrative. In this respect it supplements the Aarne-Thompson *Types of the Folk-Tale*.

Relationship between the *Type-Index* and the *Motif-Index* has been close in many ways. Although the motif classification had not been entirely completed at the time of the revision of the Aarne *Verzeichnis*, the numbers were inserted at the proper place in the motif-analyses of the various types.³² In the *Motif-Index* also, care was taken to make note of the appearance of the motif in the various tale-types.

It would seem that careful analysis of stories into motifs and proper cross-indexing would teach much about the nature of these narrative elements. Do some of them owe their existence to a particular story and belong nowhere else? Do some combine freely everywhere? Are some isolated, living an independent life as a single-motif tale-type?

Much improvement in folktale surveys of various areas would now seem possible by the use of a combination of the two indexes. By furnishing a motif-analysis of each type the author could not only indicate its presence but also state the exact form in which it appears.³³ He could thus give a full and accurate account of the tales of an area.

Use is being made of the *Motif-Index* mainly for two purposes. Several works containing many motifs have special indexes based on this classification. Such are Penzer's edition of *The Pentamerone of Basile*, McKay's *More West Highland Tales*, and Carrière's *French Folklore from Missouri*, and the author's *Tales of the North American Indians*. The *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Märchens* carries the appropriate motif-numbers in its margins.

A considerable program of surveying narrative material which has little relation to the *Types of the Folk-Tale* is now under way, and for these the *Motif-Index* appears to serve as a satisfactory basis. D. P. Rotunda's *Motif-Index of the Italian Novella*³⁴ illustrates its use with these literary tales. The fabliau, the Irish mythological and heroic texts, some of the medieval romantic cycles, the Icelandic Fornaldersögur, Renaissance jest books, and African tales are all being worked on and may be expected without great delay. All of these studies naturally furnish new motifs, which it is hoped will all be embodied in an eventual new edition of the *Motif-Index*.

No differentiation is made in the classification as to the literary *genre* to which a particular item may belong. Not only *Märchen*, but also *Sagen*, fables, jests, exempla, myths, and *novelle* have furnished these motifs. For the student investigating one of these special forms it is convenient to have together all the incidents belonging to that form. For this reason,

³² A few numbers, thus prematurely announced, proved impossible to retain, but on the whole the references are correct.

³³ I am attempting such an analysis of the oral tales of India.

³⁴ Indiana University Publications, Folklore Series, No. 2 (Bloomington, 1942).

special check-lists of motifs for each of these large fields have been prepared and are being used. It would seem possible that as such lists are perfected they may serve as quite satisfactory classifications for each of these forms, since stories of these categories for the most part consist of single motifs.

It is, of course, clear that the main purpose of the classification of traditional narrative, whether by type or motif, is to furnish an exact style of reference, whether it be for analytical study or for the making of accurate inventories of large bodies of material. If the two indexes can in this way promote accuracy of terminology and can act as keys to unlock large inaccessible stores of traditional fiction, they will have fulfilled their purpose.